



A Delicate Balance: Social Science Perspectives on Risk Regulation

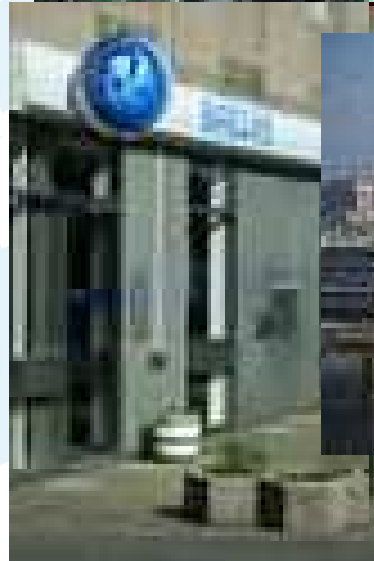
**LSE Alumni Lecture and Chevening Alumni lecture, Beijing 7-8
December 2008**

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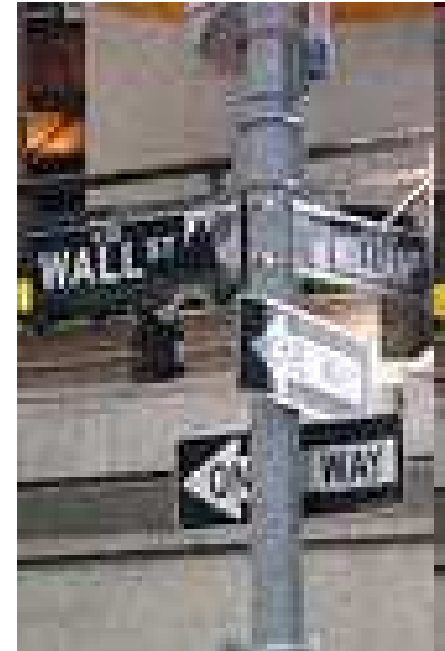
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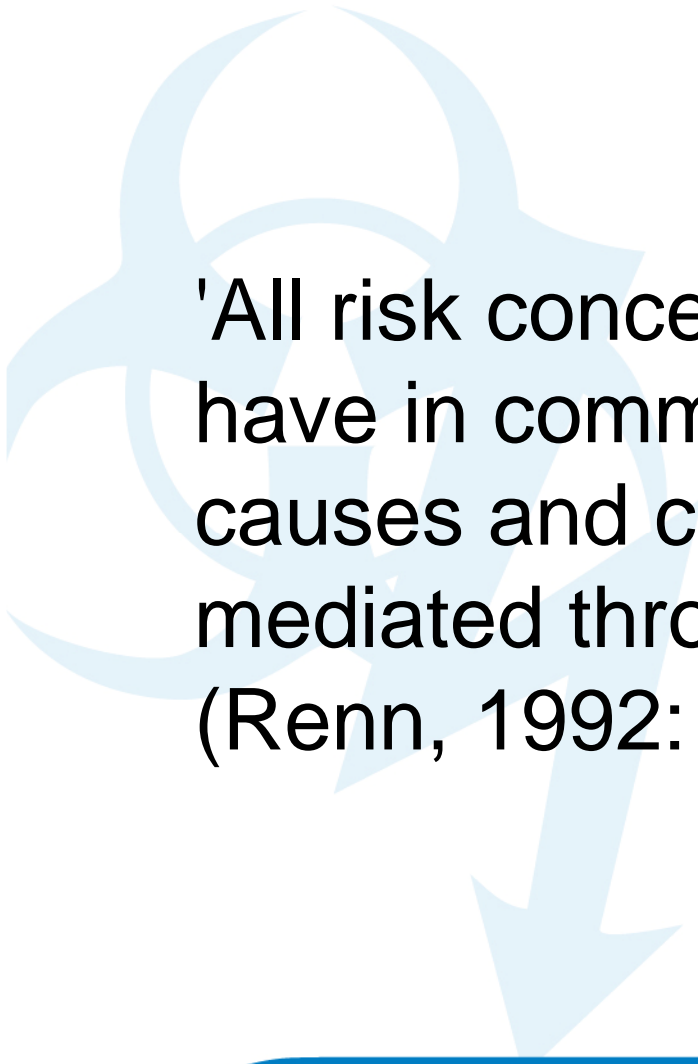
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A large, faint, light blue graphic in the background. It consists of a circular shape with a stylized arrow pointing downwards from the top, resembling a biohazard symbol or a risk indicator.

'All risk concepts of the social sciences have in common the principle that the causes and consequences of risks are mediated through social processes'
(Renn, 1992: 61)



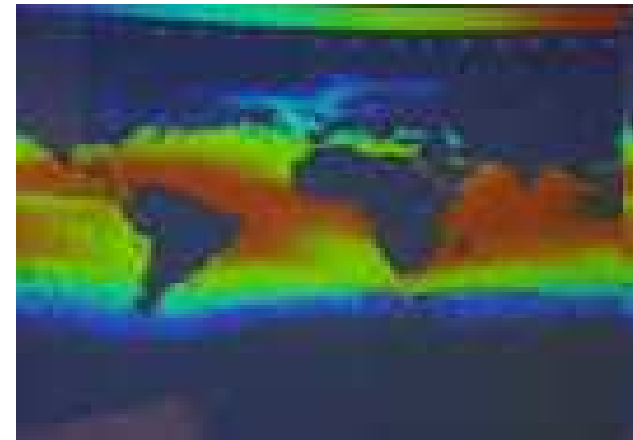
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Global risks

- Climate change
- Global warming
- The credit crunch



Science and 'technologies of the future'

- Genetically Modified Crops
- Stem cell
- Nanotechnology
- Nuclear power



Beck (2006) We live in a world where we are 'increasingly occupied with debating, preventing and managing risks'

Luhmann's (1993) distinguishes between risks and dangers – risk is associated with 'potential' losses as opposed to the actual losses involved with dangers.

Giddens (1999: 3) sees a growing preoccupation with the future. He argues that there is no longer a belief in fate but an 'aspiration to control' the future.

- ‘..substantial disagreement remains over what is risky, how risky it is and what to do about it’.
- ‘better measurement opens more possibilities, more research brings more ignorance to the light of day’
- Douglas and Wildavsky (1982: 64).



Decision to regulate

"We read almost daily about chemicals that threaten our air, our water, our lives - asbestos, benzene, PCBs, EDB, Agent Orange, Alar and many others. We hear charges and countercharges: callous industry, greedy lawyers, lives unnecessarily lost, billions of dollars wasted in a pointless search for perfect safety.....

How should government deal with such problems?
Which substances should we regulate? In what order?
To what extent? Who should decide and how?
(Breyer, 1993, *Breaking the Vicious Circle*)



Anticipation and Resilience

‘..even natural hazards appear less random than they used to’.

Ulrich Beck 2006

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- a reliance on calculation and a 'trust in numbers'
- the ascendancy of probabilistic views of the world
- moral imperatives to protect publics from risk events wherever possible.
- political imperatives to avoid blame.



Risks of risk anticipation

- False assurance
- Over-confidence
- Misplaced legitimacy and trust
- Wasting resources
- Unanticipated consequences
- Creation of new risks
- Value conflicts



Giddens refers to a 'plurality of future scenarios' and no certainty about which is most accurate. (2006: 4)

Beck refers to the 'optimistic futility with which the highly developed institutions of modern society...attempt to anticipate what cannot be anticipated' (2006: 329)

Perrow (2007: 176) – organizations are imperfect so cannot provide complete security

Clarke (1999: 4) speaks of organizations trying to 'control the uncontrollable'.



Regulation by and beyond the state

State activity – state regulators

Risk regulation beyond the state

Economic sector regulators

Example: industry or trade organizations
companies themselves
consultancy businesses

Civil sphere

Example: non-governmental organizations (NGOs),
charities, trusts and advocacy groups

Table 1.0: The range of influences upon managers when considering food safety and food hygiene risks. Based upon the statistical mean of all questionnaires (completed) by managers.


Consumer concerns	Managers understandings of relative importance of consumer concerns	Importance Index (Mean values of questionnaires)
Food safety and hygiene	Most Important	1.1
Price (value for money)		1.65
Labelling & product description		2.2
BSE		2.35
Food additives		2.4
G.M. (Genetic Modification) / Use of pesticides to grow food		2.55 / 2.55
Organic	Least Important	2.7

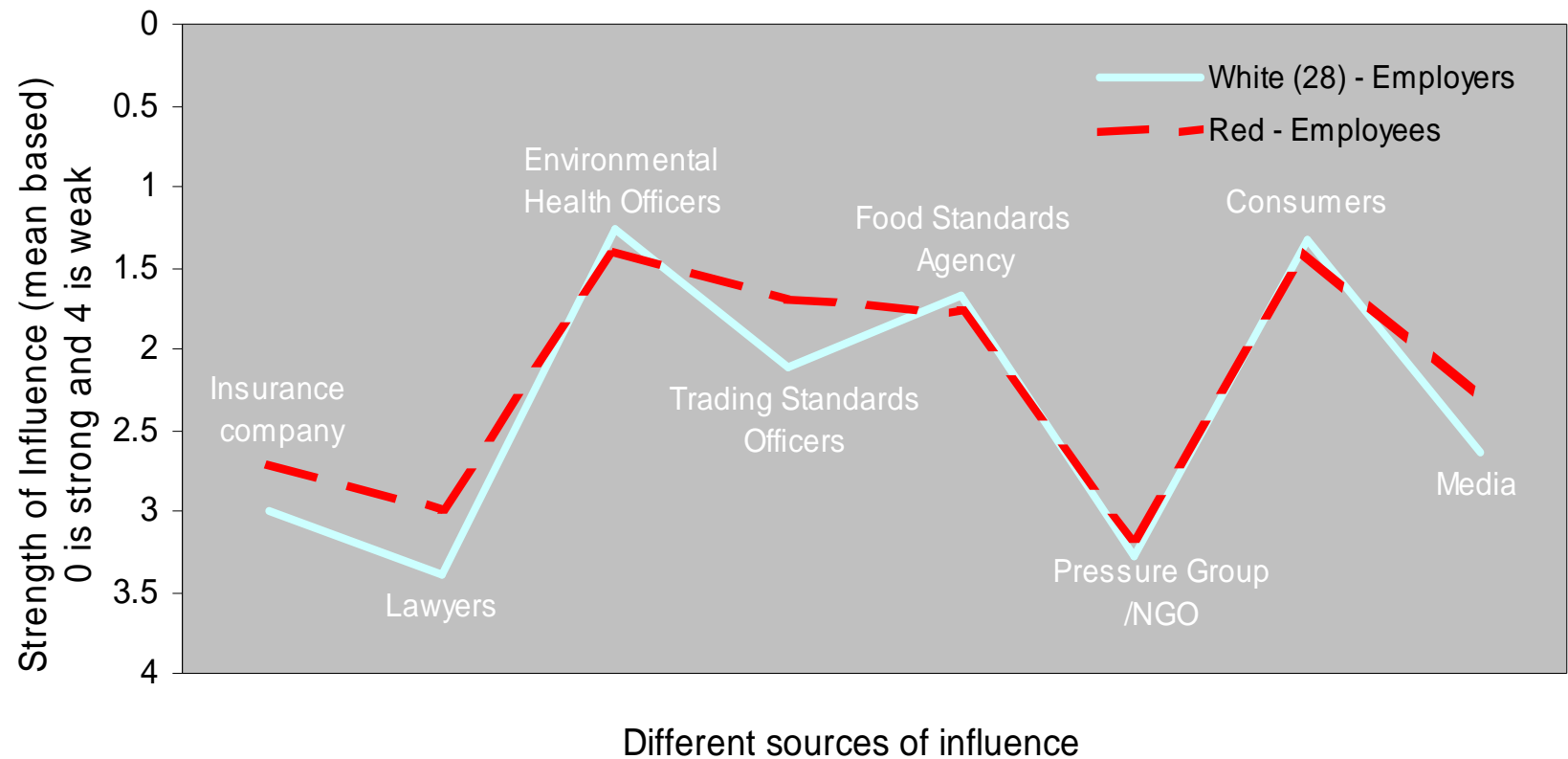
Table 2.0: The range of perception importance to consumers by managers when considering a range of food attributes commonly related to risk. Based upon the statistical mean of all questionnaires (completed) by managers.

- “Customers come here for the cleanliness, the atmosphere and the freshness of the products.”
- “I think that's why we are doing well. Customers know that X restaurants are clean, well presented. They will probably see staff washing their hands.”

- “When bad practices are shown on TV I think people think that all catering businesses are run the same!! Not right”.
- Manager–contract catering business.

- ‘Insurance is the enemy of the good as it is designed to average out loss resulting in the good not being rewarded and the bad not being punished.’

Sources and Strengths of Influence





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